

India. He spoke of the similarity of the views of both countries on several major international issues such as multipolarity and globalisation. He added that differences between the two countries were far outweighed by common ground.

Mekong-Ganga Swarna Bhumi Project

174. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether he has launched a six nation Mekong Ganga Swarna Bhumi Project during his visit to Laos; and
- (b) the aims of this project and the names of countries joining this project?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) and (b) The Vientiane Declaration on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation was signed in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 10 November, 2000 between the Governments of India, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. This initiative aims to promote cooperation among these six countries in the areas of Tourism, Culture, Education, Transport and Communication. Cooperation in the sectors identified under the Vientiane Declaration between the six countries stresses their civilisational affinity and expresses the revival, in the present day context, of an interactive vitality that has proven itself in the past, and can culturally and commercially energise the region.

Refugees from Afghanistan

175. SHRIMATI JAYAPRADA NAHATA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether about 30,000 Indians left Afghanistan due to the political upheaval;
- (b) if so, the action taken to help such refugees on their arrival in India; and